

**Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) and
Australia Pacific Islands Disability Support (APIDS)**

**Capacity Development for Effective and Efficient
Disabled Persons Organisations in
Pacific Island Countries**

Report on Tonga component of Research

March 2012

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1. Introduction

A Pacific-wide research program entitled “Capacity Development for Effective and Efficient Disabled People’s Organisations in Pacific Island Countries¹”, commenced in February 2011 with the financial assistance of AusAID. The research process covers 12 countries and continues to June 2012. Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) is undertaking the research in collaboration with Australia Pacific Islands Disability Support (APIDS). The research team comprises representatives from both organisations and includes in-country researcher(s) nominated by each national member Disabled People’s Organisation (DPO).

In August/September 2011, the research team undertook activities in Tonga. This was the sixth country to be visited, following the pilot study visit to Fiji in February 2011 and research activity in the Cook Islands in March 2011, Samoa in May 2011, Papua New Guinea in July 2011 and Solomon Islands in August 2011. The research team included:

- Angeline Chand (PDF)
- Katabwena Tawaka (PDF)
- Robyn James (APIDS)
- Talafaiva Lotolua (NATA)
- Samisoni Tangitau (NATA)

The President of Naunau ‘o e Alamaite Tonga Association (NATA), Rheema Messer also played an active support role to the team.

This report summarises the process and findings of the research.

2. The DPOs in Tonga

In summary, the DPO situation in Tonga has the following features:

¹ This research is being undertaken jointly by PDF and APIDS, and is funded by AusAID.

- A history of DPO activity going back to 2003
- There are two national cross-disability DPOs – Naunau ‘o e Alamaite Tonga Association (NATA) and Tonga National Disability Congress (TNDC)
- NATA and TNDC are central, registered, urban-based non-profit organisations with constitutions, elected boards, voluntary staff and secure office facilities. They are organisations founded and managed by people with disabilities in Tonga, to advocate for the rights of people with disabilities and to work together to improve their situation in Tonga.
- NATA has received small amounts of funding from AusAID, NZAID, PDF and APIDS
- TNDC has received funding directly from AusAID

2.1 History of DPOs in Tonga

NATA was established in November 2003. According to current leaders, it is *made up of people with disabilities who are standing up to speak out for themselves, because they are the ones who know best about their rights and needs, and the most appropriate ways to address these issues*². The three men who formed NATA had the support of Australian and New Zealand volunteers. The first women joined in 2004.

NATA aims are:

- Empowering people with disabilities
- Educating the general public that disability does not mean inability
- Ensuring that the people with disabilities are regarded as contributors to the development of the country
- Improving care and access for people with disabilities within our communities

² From Constitution

- Insisting that all people regardless of all disability have the same access to education and employment opportunities
- Advocating for rehabilitation programs that encourage independent living
- Improving access to all public venues, including town, shops, markets, offices, car parks, footpaths, transportation by air, sea and land, education institutions, social and recreation centers and churches
- Promoting access to national media broadcasts for people with hearing and vision impairments, and people with intellectual disabilities
- Lobbying the government for funding of programs that support the people with disabilities

With small funding from AusAID, NZAID and APIDS activities such as raising community awareness and organizing sports programs and computer courses have been important since 2004. Funding also came from donations during public awareness and fund raising activities.

2010 was a significant year in the history of NATA, with some positive and negative developments. With significant new funding being provided to DPOs in the Pacific from AusAID as well as increased PDF activity, there were many learning and funding opportunities for NATA members and the organisation, including Human Rights training, a womens forum and funding for a sports program. Unfortunately the President at the time misappropriated funding from PDF and APIDS. Since then NATA Board members have devoted considerable time to responding and working through this issue. The experience, though negative, has led to stronger governance and transparency systems for the organization.

There is another DPO in Tonga - Tonga National Disability Congress (TNDC). The dream for Tonga National Disability Congress (TNDC) began in 1978. A private project was started soon afterwards called "Disabled People Independent Living". The first activities were "Weekly Target Saving" which involved people with disabilities being encouraged to save at

least 2 cents each week. TNDC was formally established in 2006 with the aim “to strengthen the human rights of people with disabilities through abridgement all aspects of life as, physically, mentally, emotionally, socially and spiritually.” As well, TNDC aims to work towards the equalization of opportunity and to promote the participation of persons with disabilities in their development and the development of the nation.

The existence of two national DPOs in Tonga reflects personality and organizational issues over time. From the outside, this situation may be seen as problematic, however, it is the responsibility of the Tongan organizations to work out how they can best represent and advocate for people with disabilities.

3. Research principles, approaches and methodology

In addition to standard research principles relating to ethical considerations and the selection of a mix of accessible, culturally appropriate tools and processes, the research team approached the methodology with four particular principles in mind:

- We sought to mix the “extraction” of information with opportunities for research participants to learn about their organisations and ways of strengthening them (including opportunities to consider their own definition of capacity and their understanding of and plans for capacity development)
- We sought to focus on understanding the strengths of organisations, how they had been developed over time and how these strengths can be used as the basis for future planning (strengths based approach) and sharing this understanding between participants
- We sought to provide opportunities for DPO-nominated people to build research skills in country through collaborative planning and implementation
- We sought to make the research process accessible for people with a variety of impairments.

In practice, the in-country research approach includes the following elements:

- Working collaboratively with the DPOs in country so they have a good sense of “ownership” of the research, rather than consider that the research is being done by outsiders
- Emphasis on respecting participants and on putting them at ease during all stages, particularly in meetings and workshops
- Asking core set of questions for participants, adapted to suit different audiences (e.g. “what do you think are the strengths of your DPO?” or “what do you think are the strengths of the DPOs with whom you work?”)
- Respecting community protocols and customs
- Ensuring different disability groups are involved and included

The research process involves a mix of tools to maximize the chances to confirm any information collected from an individual source:

- Literature survey
- Small group discussions
- Individual meetings
- Workshops
- Case studies (of selected organisations)

3.1 Methodology in Tonga

From August 29th – September 2nd 2011, the research team worked together to:

- Develop detailed plans for in-country implementation, giving specific consideration to the Tonga context
- Identify the questions within each research activity
- Allocate responsibilities among team members

- Undertake the research activities with local organisations in the disability sector and their stakeholders, including meetings and a workshop at the end of the week
- Collate findings at the end of the week of activities and identify lessons about how to improve the research process and methodology for subsequent country visits

Once planning had been undertaken, the following meetings were held during the week:

- A workshop was held on 30th August with Board and members of NATA and one member of the TNCD with the aims of:
 - identifying the organisations' strengths, capacity development options and how people would like to work with donors and development partners
 - To introduce the strengths based approach concept, on which the research is based and which is relevant to capacity development planning
- Interviews with stakeholder groups, including education providers, support services, non-government organisations and government departments

A final workshop of members of NATA and TNDC was organised on the last day of the in-country visit, for the following purposes:

- To share initial findings and seek discussion and confirmation of these findings
- To discuss two terms: capacity and capacity development
- To provide an initial opportunity for collaborative planning for capacity development of NATA

Annex 1 provides the list of research activities each day.

In summary, 29 people participated in meetings, interviews and the workshops. Of the participants, 16 are women (55%) and 21 (72%) have disabilities. A total of 12 people with disabilities attended both workshops.

4. Findings

The themes listed below emerged from an analysis of notes from all meetings and were discussed and endorsed at the members' workshop on the last in-country day:

- 1) Tonga DPOs have an understanding of the issues and rights of people with disabilities in Tonga
- 2) Tonga DPOs have the ability to keep their organisations going no matter what the obstacles and with limited funding and equipment
- 3) Members of Tonga DPOs have known about their rights and have the courage to educate people in the community about their potential and abilities
- 4) Members of Tonga DPOs are active and have a strong bond
- 5) DPOs in Tonga have good leaders
- 6) DPOs in Tonga have a constitution, strategic plan, an office and a Board that meets regularly
- 7) DPOs in Tonga were formed by people with disabilities and are working hard now for all people with disabilities and in the future
- 8) DPOs in Tonga have many organisations to call on for assistance in Tonga, regionally and internationally
- 9) Members of DPOs in Tonga would like training on good governance, financial management, office systems and procedures and advocacy. Civil Society Forum, Tonga National Youth Congress (TNYC) and Mango Tree are willing to provide training in good governance, financial management and office systems and procedures
- 10) DPOs in Tonga would like funding for staff, programs and equipment
- 11) Members of DPOs and stakeholders would like NATA and Tonga National Disability Congress (TNDC) to strengthen relationships in working together for all people with disabilities in Tonga
- 12) DPOs in Tonga are encouraged to join with existing networks:
 - i. Civil society, including women, youth and church groups
 - ii. Government, especially Ministries responsible for women, youth, public works, disability and town officers
 - iii. Business groups, including Chambers of Commerce

- in educating all about the rights of people with disabilities as stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
- 13) DPOs in Tonga can involve new members using TNYC linkages to six outer islands
 - 14) DPOs in Tonga can involve all people with disabilities, including parents and carers
 - 15) DPOs in Tonga would like donors and development partners to be clear about their processes and expectations, simplify their forms and to support their priorities
 - 16) DPOs in Tonga would like donors and development partners to fund the costs of staff, an office, equipment and programs
 - 17) DPOs in Tonga would like donors and development partners to provide technical assistance
 - 18) DPOs in Tonga would like donors and development partners to provide funds for training in rights, good governance, financial management and office systems and procedures in country and in the Tongan language.

4.1 Discussion

This research attempted to understand perceptions of DPO capacity by DPOs themselves and their stakeholders, as well as perceptions of changes in capacity over time and factors which contribute to effective change. Importantly, this research did not attempt to “measure” DPO capacity.

It should be noted that the research team was not able to meet with the Board of TNDC during the week and had minimal contact with members. Members attended the final workshop on Friday and agreed that the findings applied to their organisation as well as NATA. Stakeholders interviewed discussed NATA and did not mention TNDC. Our discussion of the findings therefore reflects an understanding of the history and activities of NATA in particular, and broader capacity development thinking.

In summary, DPOs have many capacity strengths and there are a number of factors which have contributed to DPO capacity in Tonga. Most

influencing factors have come from within the organisations and other factors reflect Tonga values or are related to the international disability rights movement.

4.1.1 Model for understanding elements of capacity

While there are many models for understanding organisational capacity, the Baser and Morgan (2009) model has been selected for framing analysis in this research. This model, based on extensive international research, suggests that capacity comprises the following five elements:

CAPABILITY TO COMMIT AND ENGAGE

Includes the following:

- the ability to encourage mindfulness (being thoughtful about the impact of words and actions)
- the ability and willingness to persevere (to keep to goals and actions even when facing difficulties)
- the ability to aspire (to be ambitious; to dream)
- the ability to embed conviction (to make sure everyone is committed to working hard towards the shared goals)
- the ability to take ownership (to make sure that any plans to change the organisation and its work are completely “owned” by the organisation itself)
- the ability to be determined (to make strong efforts to achieve goals despite any challenges or setbacks)

CAPABILITY TO CARRY OUT TECHNICAL, SERVICE DELIVERY AND LOGISTICAL TASKS

Includes the following:

- the ability to deliver services
- the ability to plan strategically (to reach longer-term objectives, not just short-term day-to-day work)
- the ability to manage the implementation of all the plans effectively and efficiently (with consideration given to different definitions of effectiveness and efficiency)
- the ability to manage the finances (in ways which comply with local laws, practices and values)
-

CAPABILITY TO RELATE AND ATTRACT

Includes the following:

- the ability to buffer the organisation or system from intrusions (to protect organisations from outside destructive or distracting events or people)
- the ability to earn the trust of others, such as donors and partners
- the ability to combine political neutrality and assertive advocacy (to be able to achieve goals confidently without upsetting politicians and others through too much blatant criticism)

CAPABILITY TO ADAPT AND SELF-RENEW

Includes the following:

- the ability to improve individual and organisational learning
- the ability to foster internal dialogue (to provide chances for people to talk with each other openly about things that are happening and what is planned)
- the ability to reposition and reconfigure the organisation
- the ability to incorporate new ideas
- the ability to map out a growth path

CAPABILITY TO BALANCE DIVERSITY AND COHERENCE

Includes the following:

- the ability to communicate
- the ability to build connections (to work collaboratively with other organisations)
- the ability to manage diversity (to make the most of different ideas from people and strengths within the organisation)
- the ability to manage paradox and tension (to work out how to deal with information which is opposite from other information, and how to deal with people who have different ideas)

Using this framework, and based on the findings discussed below, DPOs and NATA in particular have a number of “stand-out” capacity strengths, including:

- the ability and willingness to persevere, particularly during times of exclusion and lack of support from others
- the ability to sustain a dream of a barrier-free, rights-based society in Tonga

- the ability to build connections with other NGOs and donors/development partners
- the ability to combine cultural respect and assertive advocacy
- the ability to improve individual and organisational learning, particularly by maximizing opportunities for members to attend training, workshops, committee meetings etc.

4.1.2 Contextual influences on DPO capacity

Within Tonga more broadly, the dominant perspective on the situation of people with disabilities is based on medical or welfare/charity models. Under these models, medical professionals, disability service providers or carers/parents make most decisions about the lives of adult people with disabilities. This has meant that until recently, organisations which influenced Government disability policy were not those comprising people with disabilities themselves, but service provider organisations and individual medical, educational and other experts. Until the last decade, there was negligible official or community recognition about the rights of people with disability, including the right to organize themselves.

The Tonga Government is a signatory to the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action (BMF).

A recent workshop to raise awareness of disability rights implemented by the Australian Human Rights Commission and PDF has been a source of information, confidence and skill for NATA.

The Government of Tonga agreed in August 2011 at a Pacific Government focal point meeting in Fiji to develop a Tonga National Policy for Persons with Disabilities by 2015.

Mango Tree Centre for People with Disabilities is a holistic family centred rehabilitation service for people with disabilities. It is run by missionaries from the Church of the Nazarene and started in 1994. Mango Tree provides free services for children and adults. Members of the DPOs benefit from these services which include computer classes, mobility aids and home renovation, an annual family camp and scholarships for education of themselves or their children. NATA also uses the centre as a meeting room. Services for children include home visits, rehabilitative therapy, Braille courses and respite care. Mango Tree understands and is supportive of the strengths and role of DPOs in Tonga.

In this context, DPO capacity has gradually increased overall since 2003.

4.1.3 Advocacy and awareness raising skills

A government representative highlighted the importance of DPOs in advocating for rights and creating awareness in the community with her statement: *an important strength is the courage to stand up as a group and get all the brothers and sisters together. The mindset has changed in the community and with workers in government because of this.*

Another government representative said that this advocacy is affecting key people in the hierarchy – including king, queen, ministers – who are aware of disability issues.

Civil society representatives and members of NATA also emphasised the ability to *talk about things that they know and experience, which is brought out in community forums.*

One of the keys to successful advocacy is people working well together with an understanding of their own and others abilities. One NATA board member said that she: *Learnt to love each other and myself. Before I came to NATA I didn't accept my disability; when I came to NATA I learnt to accept it.*

4.1.4 Internal leadership

Leadership within the DPOs was seen as being a key strength. Board members stated that: *We have the same heart. We work together as a team – we can move the community. We are working for all of the people with disability in Tonga.* Members also noted that the Board involves all members in training and workshops.

There was a shared understanding that leaders are *planning for the future for the next generation to be educated.* (Board member)

One of the civil society interviewees supported this: *In future the children of today will benefit from the work of current NATA members (Mango Tree)*

Civil society and government stakeholders alluded to leadership issues in mentioning resilience and courage: *I am impressed that they have managed to survive without funds or acknowledgement from government* (Civil Society Forum representative). A Government representative also

noted this resilience and courage: *The leaders have great courage; they are taking one small step at a time and gradually getting there.*

4.1.5 Link between DPO capacity and civil society

All civil society organisations interviewed in the research expressed a willingness to assist and work with DPOs to build on existing capacity. The Civil Society Forum of Tonga (CSF) was established in 2006 through UNDP funds as an umbrella organisation. It has 72 member organisations, including church groups, human rights groups, trade unions, community based groups, professional associations. Currently it is hosting a project to develop a leadership code for the Kingdom of Tonga. Separate codes are being developed for all (including the King, Nobles, Government, civil society) and NATA is involved in that process.

The CEO of CSF expressed a willingness to assist in many ways including the following:

- Facilitating dialogue and raising issues between civil society and government stakeholders through linking into networks, such as women, youth, church and trade associations
- Assisting in facilitation of meetings and workshops
- Including NATA as part of the Human Rights committee looking at the UN periodic review
- Organising meetings of all disability stakeholders to facilitate discussion on issues and how organisations can support each other
- Providing one to one capacity building on governance, strategic planning, financial planning and establishment of systems, information and media.

The Tonga National Youth Congress (TNYC) was founded in 1991 as the key non-government organisation focusing on issues that affect Tonga's youth. It is currently providing a room for NATA (without charge) to use as an office. During the research process in Tonga, the TNYC advised they could assist with purchasing office equipment and providing training for office staff especially in the area of financial management. Taking up the

offers and suggestions of civil society organisations will add greatly to the capacity of NATA and TNCD.

4.1.6 External factors which contribute to capacity

Members, including Board members, acknowledge that there are many organisations in Tonga to collaborate with in order to strengthen the work of DPOs. They identified the Civil Society Forum, Tonga National Youth Congress, Mango Tree, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Womens Affairs, Latter Day Saints and Paralympics Committee as organizations they should build good communications with.

Regionally, relationships with PDF, APIDS, PWD Australia, JICA, AusAID and Motivation Australia were highlighted

Attendance by office bearers and members at Australian Development and Disability Consortium conferences, Australian Leadership Award Fellowship programs (ALAF), Human Rights Training and other support from PDF has been significant in increasing the capacity of individual people with disability.

The Ministry of Health representative highlighted international connections as being great source of strength to DPOs.

4.1.7 How DPOs want partners to assist in future

NATA Board members were clear about how donors and development partners can best assist in their work. These wishes were endorsed by TNDC Board and members at the final workshop, and are part of the earlier findings.

Two findings are significant and are highlighted here. First, a partnership approach to supporting the work of DPOs is particularly emphasised: *we want to have a mutual understanding of the donor/development partner processes and expectations and to be able to explain what we need in Tonga.*

Training opportunities such as those through ALAF would be most appropriate and affect more people if they are: *delivered in Tonga in the Tongan language so that there are more than the one or two people travelling overseas; then the Tongan people can see what we are doing too, rather than be suspicious about what is being taught.*

4.2 Summary

This research concludes that:

- DPOs in Tonga have significant strengths particularly in internal leadership and advocacy skills
- Using the strengths-based approach was especially significant at this point in the history of NATA as it provided motivation to look forward and plan for the future
- Civil society organisations are willing to provide significant support to NATA and TNDC in developing their capacity

Annex 1: List of research activities

Monday 29th August

Meeting of research team

Tuesday 30th August

Workshop with members

Wednesday 31st August

Interviews with civil society stakeholders:

Siale Ilolahia, Civil Society Forum of Tonga

Rev. Amanaki Kim and Ofa Kim, Mango Tree Centre for People with Disabilities

Vanessa Lolohea, Tonga National Youth Congress

Thursday 1st September

Interviews with government ministry stakeholders:

Kalolaine Moeaki, Ministry of Education, Womens Affairs and Culture

Belinda Jordan (Australian volunteer), Ministry of Education, Womens Affairs and Culture (Department of Inclusive Education)

Dr Mapa Ha'ano Puloka, Ministry of Health

Friday 2nd September

Workshop with members – findings and planning for the future

Reflection of research team